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RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 6394
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 4207
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SUBJECT: GOC FIGHTING TO CONTAIN NEW CRIMINAL GROUPS

REF: BOGOTA 5882

Summary

¶11. Combined GOC military and police efforts to combat new criminal groups are making progress, with 1,710 captures and 568 kills of gang members from January through mid-November 2007. The share of demobilized ex-AUC among these new groups appears to be falling, indicating that reinsertion programs and targeted law enforcement are slowly succeeding. The Organization of American States' Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia's (MAPP/OAS) most recent report applauds the GOC's efforts to combat the new groups, but underscores their ability to regenerate through drug trafficking. End Summary.

Increased Captures and Kills

¶12. Colombian National Police (CNP) officials provided us with recent data showing their latest results in fighting new criminal groups. From January 1 through November 14, 2007, combined military and police forces captured 1710 group members and killed 568. These results already exceed the numbers for 2006 (1014 captures and 143 kills) and reflect the greater GOC effort to prevent an AUC-like resurgence of criminal groups. Figures for October alone showed 216 captures and 58 kills. A contributor to October's spike was the mass demobilization of a renegade bloc (Cacique Papinta) of 51 paramilitaries, a holdout from the AUC era. Police estimate there are 23 emerging criminal groups with a combined membership of 2300 persons, down from 3000 earlier in 2007. CNP officials say other groups' higher estimates--which range from 3000 to 4500--do not reflect the public forces' results. The CNP verifies numbers reported by other services and excludes undocumented Army takedowns.

Fewer Demobilized Back To Crime

¶13. Statistics show a drop in the number of demobilized paramilitaries among captured or killed members of new criminal groups. At midyear, police estimated that 16 to 18 percent of new groups' members were demobilized AUC, but the average for 2007 has now fallen under 12 percent. Police

monitor recidivism using detailed bio-data bases compiled during the AUC demobilization process, and those data bases have facilitated round-ups of 'recycled' criminals. Falling numbers of ex-AUC within new groups indicate that both reinsertion programs and targeted law enforcement are slowly succeeding in deterring former paras from joining new groups.

October Results - Nationwide

¶4. October's progress against new groups was widespread, with the GOC attacking groups throughout the country. Significant blows were struck against the highest profile groups --Organizacion Nueva Generacion and Rastrojos in Narino and the Aguilas Negras in Norte de Santander. CNP action against the Narino groups follows charges by human rights groups of GOC inaction, or in some case security force collusion, with ONG and highlights GOC resolve to deal with this problem. Through regional councils coordinating military, police, and civilian agencies, significant results have also been achieved against new groups in the north (Cesar, Magdalena), south (Putumayo), east (Meta/Vichada), and west (Choco). CNP officials said there continues to be no evidence of a national command and control structure among the new groups, noting that many local criminal bands claim the "Aguilas" name to enhance their prestige.

OAS: Groups Are Small, Mobile, and Low-Profile

¶5. The MAPP/OAS' Tenth Report on the AUC demobilization applauds GOC's efforts to combat the new groups, but notes the groups' ability to regenerate using profits from the drug trade. "The Mission has noted the government's efforts to gain ground.... However, despite stepping up its operations and strikes against the rearmed remnants of self defense forces, the capacity for reinvention and recruitment of these units, funded with resources from drug trafficking, makes it possible for them to continue...."

¶6. CNP and MAPP/OAS analysts agree the new groups are focused solely on drug profits, without political pretensions or aspirations for influence. They are characterized by high levels of criminal activity (such as smuggling or extortion) but relatively low levels of violence (mostly targeted assassinations of competitors). The groups seek to avoid police attention, and are smaller and more mobile than the previous AUC blocks, complicating police and military efforts to target them. Still, the OAS has detected movement by some bands from Uraba to Magdalena, or from Antioquia to Meta, suggesting some are trying to build more extensive networks.

Brownfield